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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 TRSE-00 /059 W
----------116783 061759Z /40
R 061734Z SEP 77
FM AMCONSUL VANCOUVER
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3724
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
ALL AMCONSULS CANADA POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: BRITISH COLUMBIA VIEW OF NATIONAL LEADERS OF
THE GOVERNMENT AND OF THE OPPOSITION

1. SUMMARY. AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL, ONLY THE LIBERAL AND PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTIES COUNT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA POLITICS. WHILE B.C. WOULD NORMALLY BE CONSIDERED SOLID TORY COUNTRY, JOE CLARK IS NOT PERCEIVED BY THE PUBLIC AS A CREDIBLE LEADER EITHER OF THE PARTY OR OF CANADA. HIS FAILURE TO SPARK PUBLIC ENTHUSIASM, DESPITE VOTER CONCERN WITH THE LIBERALS' HANDLING OF NATIONAL UNITY AND THE ECONOMY, AND TO GAIN ANY BYELECTION VICTORIES, HAS TENDED TO SUBSTANTIATE THAT WIDELY HELD VIEW. CLARK'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE HIS LEADERSHIP HAVE FALTERED BADLY IN B.C. AND THE B.C. CONSERVATIVE LEADER (WHO IS STEPPING DOWN IN OCTOBER) HAS FLATLY STATED THAT THE PARTY'S OUTLOOK IN THE PROVINCE IS "VERY BLACK." WHILE TRUDEAU IS NOT DEEPLY TRUSTED IN B.C., HE IS PERCEIVED AS THE CHIEF AND MOST ABLE PROPONENT OF CONFEDERATION IN WHICH BRITISH COLUMBIANS DEEPLY BELIEVE, AND HE HAS SHOWN SIGNS RECENTLY OF BEING MORE ATTUNED TO WESTERN CANADIAN ASPIRATIONS THAN HERETO-
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FORE. EVEN HIS VIEWS ON THE CANADIAN ECONOMY ARE STRIKING MORE RESPONSIVE CHORDS IN B.C. THAN THOSE OF CLARK WHICH HAVE COME ACROSS AS TOO SIMPLISTIC AND SHALLOW. IT APPEARS HERE THAT TRUDEAU AND HIS LIBERALS COULD SCORE PARLIAMENTARY GAINS IN B.C. IN AN EARLY ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

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2. BRITISH COLUMBIANS HAVE TRADITIONALLY COMPARTMENTALIZED THEIR PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL POLITICS. WHILE THE PRESENT PROVINCIAL POLITICAL SCENE IS POLARIZED BETWEEN THE SOCIAL CREDIT AND NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTIES, THERE IS LITTLE, IF ANY, AFFINITY BETWEEN OR LOYALTY TO THESE PARTIES AND THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE SAME NAME. MANY BRITISH COLUMBIANS FIND NATIONAL NDP LEADER BROADBENT A SENSIBLE AND HARDWORKING LEADER (IN THE GALLUP POLL RELEASED JUNE 18, FORTY-FOUR PERCENT THOUGHT HE WAS AN ASSET TO HIS PARTY, 41 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION AND 16 PERCENT THOUGHT HE WAS NOT AN ASSET). IT IS, HOWEVER, UNLIKELY HE WILL EVER FORM A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE ONLY TWO PARTIES, THEREFORE, WHICH COUNT AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL IN B.C. ARE THE LIBERALS AND THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES AND AT THE MOMENT TRUDEAU'S LIBERALS ARE RIDING HIGH IN B.C. THE JUNE 18 GALLUP POLL SHOWED THAT A SOLID MAJORITY (59 PERCENT) OF BRITISH COLUMBIANS BELIEVE THAT PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU ON THE WHOLE IS AN ASSET TO THE LIBERAL PARTY, AS COMPARED TO 31 PERCENT WHO THINK HE IS NOT AND ONLY 10 PERCENT WHO "DON'T KNOW." THE B.C. POLL RESULTS CLOSELY MATCH GALLUP ALL-CANADA FIGURES. OPINION ON TORY LEADER CLARK IS SPLIT THREE WAYS: 36 PERCENT THINK HE IS AN ASSET, 33 PERCENT THINK HE IS NOT, AND 32 PERCENT DO NOT KNOW WHETHER HE IS OR NOT. PUBLIC AMBIVALENCY IS MR. CLARK'S MAJOR LEADER-SHIP PROBLEM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

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3. BRITISH COLUMBIA AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL IS TRADITIONALLY TORY COUNTRY. TO THE EXTENT IT IS NOT AT THE PRESENT TIME IS LARGELY BECAUSE THE PUBLIC DOES NOT PERCEIVE JOE CLARK AS A CREDIBLE OR DYNAMIC LEADER. HIS INABILITY TO SCORE ANY BY-ELECTION VICTORIES AGAINST TRUDEAU AND THE LIBERALS LAST MAY ON UNITY AND/OR ECONOMIC GROUNDS WAS WIDELY NOTED IN B.C. BOTH THE VANCOUVER SUN AND THE PROVINCE HAVE NOTED EDITORIALLY IN RECENT WEEKS THAT CLARK HAS VIRTUALLY VANISHED IN THE FACE OF THE SERIOUS ISSUES FACING THE COUNTRY. THE PROVINCE HAS DECLARED CLARK TO BE "AN ALSO-RAN AS A FIGHTER FOR CONFEDERATION" AND THE SUN HAS DUBBED HIM A FAILURE FOR HIS SEEMING INABILITY TO PROVE HIMSELF AS A SERIOUS ADVERSARY OR ALTERNATIVE TO TRUDEAU.

4. IN LATE MAY AND EARLY JUNE, CLARK CAMPAIGNED EXTENSIVELY THROUGHOUT BRITISH COLUMBIA BUT WAS UNABLE TO REACH OUT AND AROUSE ENTHUSIASM IN EVEN THE MOST CONSERVATIVE AREAS OF THE PROVINCE. SUBSEQUENTLY, B.C. CONSERVATIVE LEADER SCOTT WALLACE (HOLDING THE ONLY CONSERVATIVE SEAT IN THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE) ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD STEP DOWN IN OCTOBER AND MIGHT EVEN RESIGN HIS SEAT. HE STATED AT THE TIME THAT THE OUTLOOK FOR CONSERVATIVES IN BOTH THE

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NEXT FEDERAL AND B.C. ELECTIONS IS "VERY BLACK" AND THAT
CLARK HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO TURN PEOPLE ON ALTHOUGH HE HAS
WORKED VERY HARD AT IT. WALLACE WENT TO THE ROOT OF THE
PROBLEM AND SAID THE NATIONAL PARTY, ON THE ADVICE OF ITS
"BACK ROOM BOYS," IS LOOKING TO THE B.C. SOCREDS FOR
SUPPORT IN THE NEXT FEDERAL ELECTION AND IS TRYING IN THE

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MEANTIME TO DO NOTHING WHICH MIGHT UPSET THEM. HE SAID THE
ASSUMPTION OF SOCRED SUPPORT "IS JUST NOT TRUE" AND "IF
THEY HAVE A FEDERAL ELECTION TOMORROW, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER
OF SOCREDS WOULD VOTE LIBERAL. PREMIER BILL BENNETT CAN
VERY READILY BE IDENTIFIED AS A LIBERAL." HE ADDED, "IT IS
THE OLD STORY OF THE PARTY TRYING TO BE CLEVER AND THEY ARE
BEING DUMB. THEY ARE GETTING THE WORST OF BOTH WORLDS --
MAKING IT TOUGH ON THE PROVINCIAL CONSERVATIVES TO MAKE
GAINS AND THEY ARE BASING IT ON SUPPORT THEY ARE NOT GOING
TO GET." WALLACE CONCLUDED THAT TRUDEAU "TURNED THEM
(ELECTORATE) ON IN 1968 AND, WHATEVER THE REASON IS, HE
WILL TURN THEM ON AGAIN."

5. BRITISH COLUMBIANS DON'T REALLY TRUST TRUDEAU VERY MUCH,
BUT HE IS SEEN AS THE CHIEF PROPONENT OF CONFEDERATION AND
THE ONLY LEADER ON THE SCENE TODAY WHO CAN PRESERVE ONE
CANADA, AN ISSUE ABOUT WHICH BRITISH COLUMBIANS FEEL
DEEPLY. FURTHERMORE, IN HIS APRIL SPEECH IN WINNIPEG,
TRUDEAU FOR THE FIRST TIME, AS POINTED OUT BY THE SUN
COLUMNIST MARJORIE NICHOLS, "WRAPPED HIS TONGUE AROUND A
FEW PRAIRIE TRUISMS." HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE WESTERN FEELING

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OF ALIENATION FROM OTTAWA, THE NEED TO LISTEN TO WESTERN
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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL GRIEVANCES WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND ADMITTED THAT THE FEDERAL APPROACH TO BILINGUALISM HAD PERHAPS BEEN MISDIRECTED. TRUDEAU'S "DISCOVERY" OF THE WEST WAS WELL RECEIVED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, ALTHOUGH FEW ARE HOLDING THEIR BREATH WAITING FOR CONCRETE EVIDENCE OF THIS. NEVERTHELESS, THE POINT IS THAT PREMIER BENNETT'S SOCRED GOVERNMENT, WHICH CONTINUES TO RETAIN ITS POPULARITY, IS ENJOYING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH OTTAWA AND HAS OBTAINED INCREASED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION.

6. IT IS TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT BY DEFAULT, THEN, THAT THE TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP LOOKS THE MOST ATTRACTIVE TO BRITISH COLUMBIANS. THEY MAY KNOW THAT CLARK IS AS MUCH IN FAVOR OF NATIONAL UNITY AS ANYONE, BUT THEY SEE HIM UNABLE TO SELL HIMSELF AS THE STEWARD OF IT. THEY WORRY ABOUT THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT BUT, AS STATED EDITORIALLY BY THE SUN ON AUGUST 17, THEY FIND AN ELEMENT OF "SILLINESS" IN MANY OF CLARK'S PROPOSALS (SUCH AS CUTTING TAXES IN THE FACE OF HIGH INFLATION) TO STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMY, AND GENERALLY AGREE WITH TRUDEAU THAT ECONOMIC CONTROLS CANNOT RESPONSIBLY BE REMOVED WITHOUT SOME SORT OF AGREED MECHANISM BETWEEN GOVERNMENT, LABOR AND BUSINESS FOR PREVENTING RUNAWAY AND UNREASONABLE WAGE AND PRICE INCREASES IN THE POST-CONTROL PERIOD. IT MIGHT BE ADDED THAT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA TRUDEAU'S MARITAL
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DIFFICULTIRES HAVE NOT HURT HIM AND MAY EVEN HAVE EARNED HIM A SYMPATHETIC VOTE OR TWD.

7. GIVEN THE CONSERVATIVE BENT OF THE B.C. ELECTORATE, THE PC WOULD IN ALL LIKELIHOOD MAINTAIN ITS HOLD ON THE PROVINCE
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WERE AN ELECTION CALLED AT THIS TIME. IT IS EQUALLY LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE LIBERAL PARTY WOULD MAINTAIN ITS POSITION AND PROBABLY SCORE MODEST GAINS. LUPPI

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